

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
COUNTY OF RICHMOND

CHRISTOPHER HANSEN,

Plaintiff,

-against-

NEW YORK ARCHDIOCESE, ST. CLARE  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF STATEN  
ISLAND, THE AMERICAN LEGION,  
WATKINS-KELLET AMERICAN LEGION  
POST 277, ANTHONY SAGONA, ABC  
CORPORATIONS 1-10, AND JOHN  
DOES 1-10.

Defendants.

Index No.

SUMMONS

TO THE ABOVE NAMED DEFENDANTS:


PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED to appear in this action by serving a notice of appearance on the Plaintiff at the address set forth below within 20 days after the service of this Summons (not counter the day of service itself), or within 30 days after service is complete if the summons is not delivered personally to you within the State of New York.

YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT should you fail to answer or appear, a judgment will be entered against you by default for the relief demanded below.

Richmond County is designated as the place for trial. The basis for venue is that the torts underlying this action occurred in Richmond County.

Dated: Roseland, New Jersey  
December 2, 2019

NAGEL RICE, LLP

By:   
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Doe*

TO: NEW YORK ARCHDIOCESE  
1011 1st Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

ST. CLARE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF STATEN ISLAND  
110 Nelson Avenue  
Staten Island, New York 10306

THE AMERICAN LEGION  
700 N. Pennsylvania St.  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

AMERICAN LEGION WATKINS KELLET POST 277  
3250 Richmond Avenue  
Staten Island, New York 10312

ANTHONY SAGONA  
114 Picadilly Dr.  
Morganville, New Jersey

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**COMPLAINT & JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff, Christopher Hansen ("Plaintiff"), by and through his attorneys, Nagel Rice LLP, hereby states as and for his complaint against the defendants the following:

**INTRODUCTION**

1. This action arises out of the sexual molestation of Plaintiff by Father Ralph LaBelle ("LaBelle") and defendant Anthony Sagona ("Sagona"), while Plaintiff was a parishioner at St. Clare's Roman Catholic Church ("St. Clare's") in Staten Island serviced by LaBelle, and a participant in the Watkins-Kellet American Legion Post 277 ("Post 277") baseball team organized, run, and supervised by the American Legion baseball league (the "AL") and coached by Sagona.

2. Between the ages of approximately fifteen through sixteen, Plaintiff was targeted by LaBelle, as one of the priests

servicing St. Clare's (under the supervision and control of the Archdiocese of New York (the "Archdiocese") who began a grooming process of plying Plaintiff with alcohol and engaged in a pattern of inappropriate sexual conduct.

3. Then, beginning at age sixteen, after having been previously groomed and sexually exploited by Fr. Labelle, Plaintiff was again targeted, groomed and then repeatedly sexually molested and abused by Sagona, who at all relevant times, served as a coach for a local American Legion sponsored baseball team.

4. Plaintiff brings this action against the defendants for compensatory and punitive damages as a result of the defendants' acts and omissions.

#### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

5. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to CPLR § 301 because the Defendants either reside or conduct business in the State of New York. Alternatively, this Court has jurisdiction pursuant to CPLR § 302 because the tortious acts alleged herein took place within the State of New York, County of Richmond.

6. Venue is proper in this Court under CPLR § 503(a) because a substantial part of the events and omissions that give rise to this claim occurred in Richmond County.

**PARTIES**

7. Plaintiff is an individual who lived in Staten Island, New York for all times relevant to this action and is currently a resident of New Jersey.

8. Defendant the Archdiocese of New York (the "Archdiocese") is, upon information and belief a non-profit organization or religious organization operating or doing business in the State of New York, County of New York. The Archdiocese is the governing body that oversees, regulates, supervises and controls each Catholic Church and the priests within the archdiocese within its geographic boundary, including defendant St. Clare's. In the decades preceding the abuse alleged in this action, upon information and belief, the Archdiocese had or should have had actual and/or constructive knowledge that priests supervised by the Archdiocese engaged in child sexual abuse and inappropriate sexual relationships with children. Further, upon information and belief, in the decades preceding the abuse alleged in this action, the Archdiocese took no steps to protect the children under their control and instead took steps to protect the abusers within their organizations.

9. Defendant St. Clare's is a Roman Catholic Church with a principal address of 110 Nelson Avenue, Staten Island, New York 10306. Upon information and belief, the Archdiocese exercise

control over St. Clare's operations, including having control over the hiring, retention and supervision of priests.

10. Defendant AL is a non-profit corporation with its principal place of business 700 N. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, Indiana. Upon information and belief, since 1925, the American Legion has created, sponsored, and supervised a baseball leagues across the United States for teenagers between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. AL accepts registrations from players, coaches, and volunteers and, upon information and belief, requires each league to abide by and comply with AL's policies and procedures. Upon information and belief, AL collects payments from each local league to support the general mission and goals of the AL.

11. Defendant Post 277 of the American Legion is a local post of the AL and a non-profit entity of New York with a principal business address of 3250 Richmond Avenue, Staten Island, New York.

12. At all relevant times, defendant Sagona is an individual with a last known address, upon information and belief, of 114 Picadilly Dr., Morganville, New Jersey. During all relevant times, Sagona served as a baseball coach for the AL and Post 277.

13. At all relevant times, defendants ABC Corporations 1-10 (said names being fictitious, true identities presently unknown) are corporations, or other entities whose identifies are presently unknown, but who may through discovery be found to be liable in whole or in part for all allegations contained in this Complaint.

14. At all relevant times, defendants John Does 1-10 (said names being fictitious, true identities presently unknown) are individuals whose identifies are presently unknown, but who may through discovery be found to be liable in whole or in part for all allegations contained in this Complaint.

**FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL COUNTS**

15. In or around 1981, Plaintiff, whose family were members of St. Clare's, was approached by Fr. LaBelle.

16. Over the next three years, between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, Fr. LaBelle began grooming Plaintiff for sexual abuse.

17. Fr. LaBelle would invite Plaintiff to his private quarters at St. Clare's.

18. Fr. LaBelle would provide Plaintiff with beer and engage in discussions of a sexual nature.

19. Soon Fr. LaBelle began inappropriately touching Plaintiff's leg and crotch area. Fr. LaBelle would also inappropriately kiss Plaintiff's cheek and face near his mouth.

20. By the time Plaintiff was sixteen years old he had been exposed to Fr. LaBelle's sexually inappropriate conduct for over one year, and was groomed to believe that such a relationship with an older authority figure was normal and the way children were supposed to interact with trusted adults in their community.

21. During the period of the sexually inappropriate relationship with Plaintiff, upon information and belief,

employees, agents, and volunteers of the Archdiocese and St. Clare's witnessed Fr. LaBelle spending inordinate amounts of time with Plaintiff.

22. It was during this time that Plaintiff then met Sagona.

23. In or around the spring or summer of 1982, after Plaintiff's high school baseball team had just won the city's junior varsity championship, Sagona approached Plaintiff about joining an AL team, Post 277, that Sagona coached.

24. Coach Sagona's AL team consisted of those players Sagona believed contained considerable skill. In or around the Staten Island baseball community, many believed playing on Sagona's team was a way to be noticed by college coaches.

25. As coach, Sagona would often select individual players for "special projects." These projects were presented as unique opportunities for the players to receive special training and attention from Coach Sagona.

26. All players on Sagona's team viewed the special projects as an honor and strove to be selected for such projects as it meant that the Coach believed the children were skilled baseball players.

27. Plaintiff was often selected by Sagona for special projects.

28. It was during the above times that Sagona began befriending Plaintiff and continued a grooming process of Plaintiff.



29. Sagona, through his role as a baseball coach of Plaintiff on Post 277 and through the AL, was aware that Plaintiff came from a household where money was tight. Sagona held himself out to be a trusted adult in Plaintiff's life and a role model. Sagona befriended Plaintiff and made him feel important.

30. Sagona also sought to isolate Plaintiff from his family, instructing Plaintiff and other members of the Post 277 team, that their parents were not welcome at the games and practices.

31. Upon information and belief, executives, supervisors, and agents of Post 277 and the AL knew or should have known that Sagona sought to isolate himself with his underage players outside the supervision of their parents.

32. Beginning the summer of 1982, Sagona offered Plaintiff \$200 for each pitching start Plaintiff made.

33. As a result of the power and authority Sagona had from his roles within the AL and his general reputation on Staten Island for baseball and basketball, Plaintiff was conditioned to trust Sagona, comply with his directions, and respect Sagona as a mentor. Eventually, Sagona abused this position of trust and what Plaintiff believed was a true friendship turned sexual.

34. Knowing Plaintiff's parents worked and Plaintiff did not have access to a car, Sagona would often escort and drive Plaintiff to and from AL league games and practices. During these car rides,

Sagona began to sexualize the conversation between himself and Plaintiff.

35. Eventually, Sagona's actions turned physical. The first physical manifestation of Sagona's abuse occurred at Sagona's home at 19 Cromer St., Staten Island, New York.

36. During these interactions, Sagona would offer Plaintiff cash in exchange for sexual favors. During these encounters, Sagona would tell Plaintiff that this type of relationship was normal for his top players, was something all the guys did, and was their little secret that no one would know about.

37. Sagona began having Plaintiff perform oral sex and eventually escalated the abuse into anal sex.

38. These episodes of sexual conduct occurred beginning in 1982 and continued for the remainder of time Plaintiff was a minor.

39. Over the period of abuse Plaintiff endured as a minor, Plaintiff eventually became numb to the sexual conduct, believing it to be a natural part of the loving friendship he had with Sagona.

40. During the years of abuse, upon information and belief, employees, agents, and volunteers of Post 277 and the AL witnessed Sagona spending inordinate amounts of time with Plaintiff.

**COUNT I**  
**NEGLIGENCE**

**(Against the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277)**

41. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

42. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 owed Plaintiff a duty to use reasonable care to ensure the safety and well-being of each youth who attended and/or participated in sports programs managed, controlled, supervised or operated by these defendants.

43. Upon information and belief, defendants the Archdiocese, and St. Clare's knew had or should have had actual and/or constructive knowledge that LaBelle was a sexual predator and was engaged in a sexually inappropriate relationship with Plaintiff.

44. Upon information and belief, defendants the AL and Post 277 knew had or should have had actual and/or constructive knowledge that Sagona was a sexual predator and was sexually abusing Plaintiff.

45. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 took no steps to prevent or stop the abuse of Plaintiff.

46. As a direct and proximate result of the negligence and carelessness of the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, Post 277, John Does 1-10, and ABC Entities 1-10, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited

to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, jointly and severally, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT II**

**NEGLIGENT HIRING, SUPERVISION, AND RETENTION  
(Against the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277)**

47. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

48. At all relevant times, Fr. LaBelle was a priest at St. Clare's, approved, supervised, and controlled by the Archdiocese to supervise, mentor, and care for teenage males.

49. At all relevant times, Sagona was a coach approved and authorized by the AL and Post 277 to supervise, mentor, and care for teenage males.

50. The positions for which Fr. LaBelle and Sagona were retained required them to work closely with, mentor, and counsel, young boys.

51. At all relevant times, Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, had the duty to hire, properly train, oversee, and supervise Fr. LaBelle and Sagona.

52. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, breached the aforesaid duty, and their actions and inactions damage Plaintiff.

53. As a direct and proximate result of the negligence and carelessness of the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, John Does 1-10, and ABC Entities 1-10, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, jointly and severally, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT III**

**FAILURE TO WARN AND IMPLEMENT ADEQUATE CHILD SEX ABUSE POLICIES  
(Against the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277)**

54. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

55. At all times relevant the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 failed to exercise reasonable care and failed to take reasonable precautions for the safety and well-being of the parishioners of St. Clare's and participants in the baseball leagues that they ran, sponsored, supervised, and/or controlled, including, but not limited to Plaintiff.

56. At all times relevant the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 failed to enact and/or enforce adequate written and/or verbal policies, procedures, and regulations to educate, identify, prevent, and stop child sexual abuse from occurring to the children under the defendants' care.

57. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 were negligent and breached the aforesaid duties, and their actions and inactions were unreasonable.

58. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277's actions and inactions, including but not limited to their failure to take appropriate remedial action to prevent and/or address the aforesaid conduct, failure to have an appropriate written procedure to prevent and/or address said conduct, and failure to propound and disseminate policies to educate, identify, prevent, and stop child sexual abuse from occurring, were negligent, improper and careless.

59. As a direct and proximate result of the negligence and carelessness of the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, Post 277, John Does 1-10, and ABC Entities 1-10, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, jointly and

severally, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT IV**  
**RESPONDEAT SUPERIOR**  
**(Against the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277)**

60. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

61. Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, Fr. LaBelle had a sexually inappropriate relationship with Plaintiff while LaBelle served as a priest at St. Clare's under the control and supervision of The Archdiocese.

62. Fr. LaBelle used his positions with St. Clare's, and the power vested in him by the Archdiocese and St. Clare's to gain Plaintiff's trust and confidence and to create opportunities to be alone with and abuse Plaintiff.

63. Beginning at age sixteen and continuing for as long as Plaintiff was a minor, on numerous occasions, Sagona sexually molested Plaintiff while Sagona was a coach in the AL and of Post 277.

64. It was part of Mr. Sagona's role as a coach to serve as a mentor, role model, and counselor to the children under his care. It was also part of Mr. Sagona's roles at the AL and Post 277 to gain the trust of the children under his care, including Plaintiff.

65. Sagona used his positions with the AL and Post 277 and the power vested in him by the AL and Post 277 to gain Plaintiff's trust and confidence and to create opportunities to be alone with and abuse Plaintiff.

66. The Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277 are liable for Plaintiff's sexual abuse by Fr. LaBelle and Sagona under the doctrine of *respondeat superior*.

67. As a direct and proximate result, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, jointly and severally, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT V**  
**ASSAULT AND BATTERY**  
**(Against Sagona)**

68. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

69. Sagona's sexual abuse of Plaintiff when Plaintiff was a minor was extreme, intentional and outrageous conduct, beyond all possible bounds of decency, atrocious and intolerable in a civilized community.



70. Sagona's sexually abusive conduct against Plaintiff constitutes an intentional, unwarranted physical touching and intrusion into Plaintiff's personal space, his physical well-being, and psychological state.

71. As a direct and proximate result of the intentional conduct of Sagona, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendant Sagona, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT VI**  
**INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**  
**(Against Sagona)**

72. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

73. Sagona's sexual abuse of Plaintiff when Plaintiff was a minor was extreme and outrageous conduct, beyond all possible bounds of decency, atrocious and intolerable in a civilized community.

74. At the time Sagona sexually abused and molested Plaintiff, which Sagona knew would cause, or disregarded the substantial probability that it would cause, severe emotional distress.

75. As a direct and proximate result of the intentional conduct of Sagona, Morrison sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendant Sagona, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT VII**  
**NEGLIGENT INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**  
**(Against All Defendants)**

76. Plaintiff repeats and restates the allegations of all the preceding paragraphs as if set forth at length herein.

77. All Defendants owed a duty to Plaintiff, by virtue of his status as a minor and participant in the church activities and baseball leagues organized, sponsored, supervised, and or run by defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277.

78. It was part of Fr. LaBelle and Sagona's roles as a priest and coach, respectively, to serve as a mentor, role model, and counselor to the children under their care. It was also part of Fr. LaBelle and Sagona's roles as a priest and coach, respectively, at St. Clare's and the AL and Post 277 to gain the trust of the children under his care, including Plaintiff.

79. Fr. LaBelle and Sagona used their positions with St. Clare's and the AL and Post 277, and the power vested in him by

the Archdiocese and the AL, to gain Plaintiff's trust and confidence and to create opportunities to be alone with and abuse Plaintiff.

80. Fr. LaBelle and Sagona breached their duty to Plaintiff by sexually abusing Plaintiff.

81. Defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, and Post 277, and Sagona breached their duties to Plaintiff through their negligent retention, supervision, failure to warn, and other actions and inactions that permitted the abuse of Plaintiff.

82. As a direct and proximate result of the negligent conduct of the defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, Post 277, Sagona, John Does 1-10, and ABC Entities 1-10, Plaintiff sustained severe and permanent injuries, including but not limited to pain, suffering, emotional and psychological trauma and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against defendants the Archdiocese, St. Clare's, the AL, Post 277, and Sagona, jointly and severally, or in the alternative for damages, punitive damages, interest, costs of suit, attorney's fees, and such other relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

**JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury of all issues.

Dated: Roseland, New Jersey  
December 2, 2019

**NAGEL RICE, LLP**

By: 

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